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**Scales of Social,
Environmental &
Cultural Change
in Past Societies**

ABSTRACT BOOK

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ABSTRACT BOOK

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**Scales of Social, Environmental & Cultural Change
in Past Societies**

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Titel: Excavation of Neolithic wooden trackway from Aschen Moor, Lower Saxony, Germany. (Photo: Jan Piet Brozio)

S37: Why do people discard? Questioning the relationship between valuation and behaviour

Trash and waste are among the major global challenges currently faced by mankind. It seems obvious that there is a connection between the material prosperity of a society and the amount of waste it they produce. A rethinking process is only slowly beginning, and initiatives to reduce waste are often accompanied by a trend toward reducing consumption, requirements that struggle to achieve a broad social acceptance. Is it possible to trace such a connection in past societies? The session will look at the roots of these developments. Trash as a category is first and foremost an attribution closely linked to value systems and ideologies. It is created by valorization or devaluation, by sorting out and exclusion. These processes are not limited to materiality, but also take effect in social contexts and can even be transferred to people.

What connections can be recognized between the handling of objects and ideological concepts? Do the depositional practices of a past society reflect its standards of valuation? What criteria can be used to determine the value of an object (or subject) in archaeological findings? In this respect, self-reflection also matters. Public perception differs from the scientific approach. In popular opinion, archaeology is about finding treasures, but scientific archaeology is mainly about understanding rubbish.

Inevitable by-products of human activities, from slag to food crust or coprolites, have a value as a source of information about human behavior. The same is true for caches of raw material or valuable artifacts like weapons that can be seen as intentional wastage of goods, a way of eliminating surplus wealth in order to justify continued coercion and extraction. We want to focus on the everyday objects between debitage and treasure. Can a valid attribution of value in past societies be derived from the way they are handled and deposited? What does this tell us about the prosperity of the related society?

S37.281

Individual experience and emotional closeness: Archaeologists' valuation of encountered objects

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Psychology, economy, religion, society, and environment (geology, climate, flora, and fauna) are all interrelated with material culture ([1]) and shape human behaviour. Consequently, in order to judge ancient people's valuation of objects and understand patterns of discard, we have to consider all cultural aspects and subsystems. It is not only the public that usually values ancient finds in an economic sense and admires treasure items, but the similar behaviour archaeologists themselves express. Such a professional attitude is inherited partly from the collectors' and cultural-historical periods when objects were appreciated in aesthetic terms. Partly it comes from the processual archaeology when the research was mainly focused on the economy of past communities and societies. By phenomenological approach, I analyse the archaeologists' behaviour when encountering past remains, when unearthing and studying things. The individual's level of experience and the field of expertise (i.e., the amount and the nature of the acquired knowledge on certain types of material) determine his judgment of objects and consequent treatment. Case studies reveal differences and similarities in laic and expert's valuation of things and point to the importance of another dimension in the judging process. The individual's opportunity to realise physical closeness to evaluated objects (to look at, to touch, or even to possess) and possibly create an emotional attachment to them (cf. [2]) also influence the patterns of their keeping and discarding. We can use the same criteria for reconstructing past people's actions and their evaluation of the surrounding materiality.

References:

[1] Clarke, David L., (1978), *Analytical archaeology*, Methuen, London

[2] Bell, Taryn and Penny Spikins, (2018), The object of my affection: attachment security and material culture, *Time and Mind*, 23-39, 11(1), doi:10.1080/1751696X.2018.1433355

S37.282

There's something about the fragments... Fragmented objects in graves as a special form of discard

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Objects in graves are typically interpreted as grave goods, given to the deceased by the mourners. In Prehistoric Archaeology, they are usually understood as the material expression of the social status or biographical aspects of the deceased, especially in terms of hierarchies, rulership, wealth and power. Therefore, a certain ›value‹ is ascribed to grave goods, even if they are (old) broken, incomplete or fragmented. Especially the latter are often seen in the sense of a *pars pro toto* – a part for the whole. In fact, there are nuanced readings of these incomplete objects. In terms of John Chapman's fragmentation concept (Chapman 2000; cf. Chapman – Gaydarska 2007), they serve to enchain places and people. Their